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AUTHOR Caruso, Kathy A.; Chambliss, Catherine A.
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ABSTRACT

In order to determine the applicability of Contextual Family Therapy concepts such as loyalty, trust, and reciprocity to eastern as well as western cultures, Japanese and American college students completed the Relational Ethics Scale (RES), a measure of these contextual constructs. The subjects were 173 undergraduate students; 80 from an introductory psychology course at an American college, and 93 from the American college's sister university in Japan. There were no significant effects for sex, however there were significant effects found for nationality. The results indicate that American college students experience more vertical (familial) and horizontal (peer) loyalty, trust, and reciprocity than do Japanese college students. These results conflict with those presented in literature in which Japanese employees are determined to be more loyal and trustworthy than American workers. This occurrence could be due to errors in instrument translation, differences in values held by adult employees versus college students, and confusion about the definition of the Japanese family, particularly regarding the difference between maternal and paternal Japanese relationships. (Author/BF)

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Japanese and American College Students' Perceptions of Familial and Peer Relationships

Kathy A. Caruso

Catherine A. Chambliss

Ursinus College

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Japanese and American College Students' Perceptions of Familial and Peer Relationships

Abstract

In order to determine the applicability of Contextual Family Therapy concepts such as loyalty, trust, and reciprocity to eastern as well as western cultures, Japanese and American college students completed the Relational Ethics Scale (RES), a measure of these contextual constructs. There were no significant effects for sex, however there were significant effects found for nationality. The results indicate that American college students experience more vertical (familial) and horizontal (peer) loyalty, trust, and reciprocity than do Japanese college students. These results conflict with those presented in literature in which Japanese employees are determined to be more loyal and trustworthy than American workers. This occurrence could be due to errors in instrument translation, differences in values held by adult employees versus college students, and confusion about the definition of the Japanese family, particularly regarding the difference between maternal and paternal Japanese relationships.

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Japanese and American College Students' Perceptions of Familial and Peer Relationships

Empirical testing of Contextual Family Therapy has just begun recently (Hargrave, Jennings, and Anderson, 1991). While Boszormenyi-Nagy, Contextual Therapy's principle founder, espouses the universal applicability of Contextual Therapy (Bernal, Rodriguez, & Diamond, 1990; Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1986a and 1986b), there is little empirical data to support this claim. Although a few studies have looked at the applicability of contextual constructs for western populations (Bernal, et al, 1990; Chambliss, Caruso, & Strickler, 1992; and Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson, 1991), none have explored the suitability of contextual constructs for eastern cultures. Therefore it seemed expedient to study the applicability of key contextual constructs, especially loyalty, trust, and reciprocity, to Japanese as well as to American populations.

This prior omission of eastern cultures in contextual research is somewhat surprising given the perception of the Japanese as loyal and trustworthy, (Hall & Hall, 1987; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993; Omens, Jenner, & Beatty, 1987; and Whitley, 1991), characteristics that are central to the contextual concept of relational ethics (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984; Diamond, 1988; Frank, 1984; and van Heuseden and van den Eerenbeemt, 1987). Relational ethics involve

the perceived balance of loyalty, trust, merit, and entitlement in relationships. According to contextual theory, each person keeps a subjective mental ledger of fairness or unfairness in relationships. Dysfunctional relationships occur when there is a perceived imbalance of fairness in a relationship.

These concepts are complex and are not easily explained, as is evidenced in much of the contextual literature, especially in Boszormenyi-Nagy's original works and interviews (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1986a and 1986b; Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Krasner, 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Spark, 1984; Diamond, 1988; and Frank, 1984). In more recent literature (Van Heusden, & van den Eerenbeemt, 1991; Hargrave, & Anderson, 1990) contextual constructs are explained far more clearly and extensively.

Additionally recent literature is beginning to provide vital empirical evaluation of Contextual Therapy (Bernal et al., 1990; Chambliss, Caruso, & Strickler, 1992; and Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson, 1991). These empirical studies are important in providing the framework for additional evaluation of Contextual Family Therapy as universally applicable.

The extension of contextual studies to encompass eastern as well as western cultures is also a complex business. Nihira, Tomiyasu, & Oshio (1987) clearly explain the importance and difficulty of obtaining accurate translations of Japanese and English test questionnaires. They also caution that one needs to be aware of the importance in Japanese culture of gender

differences. Hall & Hall (1987) also clearly discuss distinctions between Japanese maternal and paternal filial loyalty, with a more unconditional bond between mother and child, and a less reciprocal, more obligatory relationship between child and father.

Other studies which contrast Japanese and American culture were done more from an economic rather than scientific or psychological standpoint (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993; Omens, Jenner, & Beatty, 1987; and Whitley, 1991). These last three studies indicated that the Japanese seemed more loyal or trustworthy than Americans. Based on these studies, it was expected that Japanese subjects would score higher on contextual constructs of horizontal (family) and peer (vertical) loyalty, trust, and reciprocity.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 173 undergraduate students; 80 from an introductory psychology course at an American college, and 93 from the American college's sister university in Japan. All were volunteers. The samples consisted of 70 men and 103 women. Ages ranged from 17 to 28 in the American sample (M = 19.03, SD = 1.46) and from 18 to 20 in the Japanese sample (M = 18.52, SD = .67). Questionnaires were administered during classes, with the consent of both students and instructors.

Materials

A Japanese translation of Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson's (1991) Relational Ethics Scale (RES) was developed with the help of two Japanese natives who also speak fluent English. Both the Japanese and the English versions of this scale contained questions pertaining to horizontal (family) as well as vertical (peer) relationships. The peer portion of the scale (Friend/RES) measured relationships with subjects' "closest friend". The family section (Family/RES) measured respondents' relationships with both parents. Each of these subscales consisted of twelve, five-point Likert type items. Although only recently developed, the RES exhibits high levels of reliability and validity.

Procedure

The RES was administered to both Japanese and American college students during class sessions. Two additional demographic questions pertaining to age and sex were also included. Both American and Japanese subjects took part in other research projects during these sessions, filling out at least one other questionnaire for unrelated studies.

Results

Scores were calculated for all subjects on the Family/RES and Friend/RES subscales by adding the appropriate directionally adjusted items. High scores on both the Friend/RES and Family/RES indicate greater levels of trust, loyalty, and reciprocity.

A 2x2 ANOVA (nationality x sex) was performed on both the family and friend measures. There were no main effects found for sex on either the family or the friend subscale. However main effects were found for nationality on both subscales. On the Family/RES, American subjects scored significantly higher than did Japanese subjects (Americans: M = 48.76, SD = 8.51, n = 77 vs Japanese: M = 41.12, SD = 10.77, n = 82; $F(1,155) = 21.013$, $p < .0001$. Similarly on the Friend/RES, Americans scored significantly higher (Americans: M = 53.19, SD = 6.88, n = 77 vs Japanese: M = 38.91, SD = 7.47, n = 82; $F(1,155) = 147.682$, $p < .0001$.

Thus Americans obtained higher scores for trust, loyalty, and reciprocity than did the Japanese on both scales. These results run counter to the perception that Japanese are more loyal, trustworthy, and have more mutual relationships than do Americans.

A t-test comparison of the two nationality groups revealed an unexpected significant age difference. The Japanese sample was younger (M = 18.52, SD = .67, n = 93), than the American sample (M = 19.03, SD = 1.46, n = 79; $t(170) = 3.01$, $p = .003$). However, age was not significantly correlated with either of the two relational subscales (Family/RES, r = .11; Friend/RES, r = .09, n.s.).

Discussion

There could be several reasons why results were counter to what was expected. First, as Nihira, Tomiyasu, & Oshio (1987) noted, careful translation of test instruments from English to Japanese is vital. A Japanese exchange student who spoke excellent English originally translated the RES from English into Japanese. However a back translation by a native Japanese college language instructor revealed possible item discrepancies across the two forms of the relational subscales.

For example, the English item, "When I feel hurt, I say or do harmful things to this person", does not imply physical violence. However, in the Japanese version, physical intimidation and violence were implied. Japanese participants might therefore have been apt to respond quite differently than their American counterparts. However, had this item inconsistency affected respondents, it would have had the net effect of increasing Japanese scores (since in scoring the item is reversed) relative to American scores, so the translation problem probably does not account for their actually obtaining significant lower scores than their U.S. counterparts. This discrepancy in item intensity occurred with a few other items, but since several were reversed, the overall input was probably negligible.

A related translation problem is illustrated in the ambiguous Japanese translation of item three, in which pleasing the Japanese

mother might anger the father. In contrast, the Americans "displease" (not anger) their "parents" (not mother or father). This difference is problematic because, according to Hall & Hall (1987), the Japanese perception of parents and family differs greatly from the American view. In Japan, relationships between children and their mothers are quite different than those between children and their fathers. The mother/child bond is one of unconditional love. Thus a Japanese child's loyalty to mother arises out of this selfless condition.

However, paternal filial loyalty is another matter entirely. In Japan, the father often works long hours and is rarely present in the home to interact with his children. Thus he is more of a tangential figure than is the Japanese mother. Loyalty to the father is expected, almost demanded, and does not involve the mutuality found in the maternal relationship (Whitley, 1991).

Therefore when Japanese respondents read the Family/RES items, with the exception of item three, their answers could vary widely, depending on whether they were envisioning their relationship with their father or mother. Furthermore Japanese definition of family includes an extended family including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, so that respondents could also have answered with these individuals in mind. The relationships with these family members is similar to the relationship with Japanese fathers; respect and loyalty are demanded rather than freely given (Hall & Hall, 1987).

Conversely, the ideal view of the American family is that of the nuclear family, consisting of father, mother and children (or just one parent and children with or without inclusion of a step-parent). Thus the extended family is not part of the American definition of family. Relationships between American children and parents are therefore more likely to be closer, with more reciprocity and a more voluntarily given loyalty than in the extended Japanese family with its enforced expectation of loyalty (Hall & Hall, 1987; and Nihira, Tomiyasu, & Oshio, 1987).

Indeed, Nihira, Tomiyasu, & Oshio's (1987) study of American and Japanese trainable mentally retarded children indicated that American parents were more verbally responsive and more openly affectionate and loving than were Japanese parents, as measured by the Warmth and Affection Scale used in their study. Results of Nihira, Tomiyasu, & Oshio's (1987) study are thus somewhat in keeping with the results of this current study. If American parents communicate better with their children, then perhaps their familial relationships are more mutual than those of Japanese families.

These findings are in direct contrast to several other recent studies. Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (1993); Omens, Jenner, & Beatty (1987); and Whitley (1991) indicate that the Japanese are reciprocal, loyal, and trustworthy in their relationships. Whitley (1991) compares his Japanese sample to other Asian cultures, so a further comparison between Japanese and American populations cannot

be drawn. However, the other two studies present Japanese employees as being more loyal and trustworthy than American employees. Their population (adult workers) is therefore quite different from the population studied here (college students and their families and friends). This difference in populations could account for the different outcomes in which Japanese are seen as more loyal, trustworthy, and reciprocal in work situations, while Americans appear more loyal, trustworthy, and mutual in family and academic settings, reflecting the possibility that adult workers are likely to have different values than college students.

Future studies focusing on the difference between adult and student populations of both cultures could address this discrepancy. Future use of less biased, randomly selected subjects instead of volunteers could also be useful. Further investigation of contextual values, contrasting eastern and western cultures might help to delineate the applicability of Contextual Family Therapy. While this study makes an effort in that direction, further studies utilizing the RES with different cultures is desirable.

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Author Notes

Kathy A. Caruso and Catherine A. Chambliss, Department of Psychology, Ursinus College.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kathy A. Caruso, Department of Psychology, Ursinus College, Collegeville, PA 19426.